Some Misconceptions about Women in Islam

﴿ بعض المفاهيم الخاطئة عن المراه في الاسلام ﴾

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Islam gave women rights and privileges at a time when only barbaric manners and values dominated.
Yet, some people argue that Islam has alienated women in some domains. In fact, this belief is a misconception. People who say so, may have read about it in a magazine or seen it on TV. A quick examination of the issues judged as unjust to women will certainly correct the misunderstanding.

Man as the head of the household:

Some people believe that a woman in Islam is regarded as inferior to man since the Quran says (what means):"Men have one degree above women." [Quran 2: 228]

In the Quran it also says (what means): "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allaah has given the one more than the other and because men support them from their means." [Quran 4:34]

This verse implies that it is a man's duty to support his wife, and not the reverse, but this, in no way, makes him superior to her.

In fact, the rights and responsibilities of a woman are equal to those of a man but they are not necessarily identical. Since men and women are not created identical, they have different physical and emotional qualities, jobs and privileges. This does not mean that women are inferior.

On the contrary, women are considered crucial members of society in Islam since they are assigned the job of bringing up future generations. People today tend to look down at housewives but, in fact, raising children is one of the most important and difficult tasks. The way a mother brings up her child determines the way he will behave in the future. This duty, which requires patience, love, understanding and wisdom was significantly assigned to women in Islam because her nature suits this job.

Allaah The Exalted, in His Wisdom, has assigned a role for each member of the family so that there would be no arguments concerning who should do what. If a sailboat has two leaders, each will want to follow a path, leading ultimately to chaos and even a crash. In the same manner, how many times have your parents fought over some decision because each had their own point of view and wanted to apply it? This is precisely why it is preferable to have one leader for each household. However, this does not give the leader the right to be a dictator, or to neglect the role of his companion. This does not make him superior to other members of his family. It just gives him a larger duty.

Inheritance:

Some people claim that Islam is unjust towards women because it entitles them to inherit half of what men get. In fact, those people only know one side of the truth.

First, the principle of women inheriting half the money is only applicable in 45 percent of the cases. In the other 55 percent, women inherit the same amount or sometimes even more. For example, a mother and a father each inherit the sixth of their son's property when they are not the only inheritors.

In addition, the laws of inheritance in Islam are proportional to the duties of spending. Indeed, a man in Islam has the responsibility of supporting his family, his brother's children (when his brother dies), his parents (when they retire and do not have an income), his children from his previous marriage (if he has them) and his household, including his wife and children. A woman, on the other hand, does not bear this responsibility. She has the freedom to use the money she collects from her dowry or work as she pleases.

You might object here, saying that women today are working and helping their husbands pay the expenses, which entitles them to share equality with men. In fact, you should know that women's economic assistance to their husbands, which has become the norm today, is only an answer to the females’ wishes. Islam does not oblige women to spend on their households. It is a free choice many women have themselves taken today to feel more liberated, so it does not entitle them to a bigger portion of the inheritance.

Polygyny:

Polygyny is one of the most questioned principles that Islam grants men and women. Indeed, many people wrongfully accuse Islam of injustice because it allows a man to have up to four wives. Nevertheless, like every instruction in the Quran, polygyny has a reason. You see, Islam is a practical religion that acknowledges the needs and temptations of human beings and provides laws that deal with them, thus preserving harmony and morality.

- Polygyny might be the solution for a couple if the wife is barren, the husband wants children of his own and the option of separation does not appeal to both parties.

- If a woman is chronically ill and is unable to perform her marital duties. Polygyny may also be the solution when the couple does not want divorce.

- Polygyny is the religion's answer to cases where some men have excessive sexual needs that cannot be fulfilled by one wife. This in no way means that men should abuse this right and use it whenever they fancy a woman. It is rather a chance Islam has provided to prevent men from committing adultery. Many people who condemn polygyny cheat on their wives, calling this phenomenon a 'swift affair.' Islam, at least, has offered the second woman

the option of being called 'a wife' rather than 'a mistress', especially in some countries where women remarkably outnumber men.

- Polygyny may settle the problem of an increased number of unmarried women, especially during wars.

However, polygyny has some limits and conditions to be met. Indeed, the Quran instructs the man to be fair with his wives on all levels, including treatment, money, house, etc. The only level where the man may have an uneven stance is the level of the feelings that he cannot control:

The Quran says (what means): "You will never be able to do perfect justice between wives even if it is your ardent desire, so do not incline too much to one of them [by giving her more of your time and provision] so as to leave the other hanging [i.e. neither divorced nor married]. And if you do justice, and do all that is right and fear Allaah by keeping away from all that is wrong, then Allaah is Ever-Forgiving and All-Merciful." [Quran 4:129]

Finally, it is worth knowing that Islam gives a woman the right to refuse polygyny for her husband by setting it as a condition during the marriage procedures. If this condition is set, then the woman is granted divorce if her husband marries another while he is still married to her.

You might ask, why could not there be polyandry (a woman having more than one husband)? The answer is simple. Islam did not allow it because Allaah is All-Aware that it will create a problem of kinship. This means that the child may not know who is actually his father (it could be anyone of the four husbands). In addition to the psychological damage it may cause, this problem also complicates the issue of inheritance. Even birds and animals do not allow polyandry.

In fact, to understand this Quranic verse, you should see another one, related to the issue in question. It reveals the wisdom behind this concept.